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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000611

SIPDIS

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TAGS: KPAO KWWW PREL OPRC OIIIP IZ

SUBJECT: STATE-OWNED MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL OF THE WAR

REF: A. A. SECSTATE 81604

1B. B. SANAA 607

1C. C. SANAA 606

1D. D. SANAA 593-MEDIA

Classified By: DCM Alan Misenheimer for reasons E.O. 12958, 1.5 (b), (c) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Although the tone of the Yemeni State owned and operated media was subdued in the first few days of the war, it has become more strident with developments in the theater of war as well as in the wake of increasing protests in yemen and the Arab world. Nevertheless, state-controlled media have not emphasized visuals of civilian casualties. Ambassador has urged Foreign Minister to promote balance in coverage. End Summary.

12. (C) Coverage in the Yemeni State owned and controlled media, consisting of several dailies and weeklies and the only television station in the country (Yemen-TV) was very controlled and cautious in the first few days of the beginning of the Iraq campaign. However, following the bloody demonstrations near the American Embassy on Friday 21, 2003, and Iraqi VP Ramadan's thinly-veiled criticism of Yemen's position, there has been a noticeable shift in the volume and tone of coverage (see ref. D). Friday's violent demonstration was reported factually only late that night on Yemen TV and the official Al-Thawra daily did not even display photographs on its first page the next day. On the other hand, both media as well as other state newspapers carried long and prominent reports on a subsequent peaceful demonstration on Thursday, March 27th, at Sanaa's central square. Yemen TV had a 20-minute coverage of the event, compared to its cursory coverage of the violent demonstration a week prior.

13. (C) All government dailies and weeklies, in coverage articles, editorials and op-ed pieces, have been using such strident terms as "Aggression against Iraq", "Unjustified aggression", "Aggression against Iraq is aggression against humanity", "A war without bases in international law", "We deplore the fall of innocent victims", "The new Vietnam War" and the like. Coverage of the war and various opinion articles cover almost half the number of pages of some of the dailies. However, it is important to note that both State television and the printed media are not using the sensational pictures of civilian casualties nor the photographs of slain coalition soldiers. TV text is often more strident than the pictures that run with it. Very often, we get footage of coalition forces in action with a text that is totally irrelevant to what is being shown. Yemen radio, which is also State owned and controlled, has been following the lead of television and the official papers.

14. (C) In a meeting with Foreign Minister Qirbi Saturday, March 29, the Ambassador raised the issue of media coverage. Ambassador told the FonMin the U.S. has no interest in targeting civilians since our strategy is to distance Saddam's regime from the Iraqi population. In fact, said the Ambassador, coalition forces have been taking great pains to avoid civilian casualties. By contrast, the Ambassador noted, the Iraqis seem to be firing on civilians who are trying to flee conflict areas. The Ambassador also noted that coalition forces are now making a huge effort to provide humanitarian relief to the population of Iraqi regions now under their control. He asked Dr. Qirbi to promote a balanced approach by ROYG, both in statements and in official coverage of events in the conflict.

15. (C) For his part, Foreign Minister Qirbi said that he feels that U.S. SecDef Rumsfeld's finger pointing at Syria and Iran were counterproductive. He said such issues should be addressed in diplomatic channels, not publicly. Moreover, said Qirbi, these public remarks give ammunition to those who predict a U.S. invasion of Syria and/or Iran, after Iraq is done.

16. (C) Comment: The increase in the stridency of tone and content in the Yemeni official media could be a direct consequence of the rising anger in the Yemeni populace that was expressed in the bloody confrontation of the March 21 demonstration and that is continuing to be expressed peacefully in subsequent demonstrations. Demonstrations in other Arab capitals and cities also seem to be fueling this

stridency as Yemenis attempt "to keep up with the Joneses." Of more significance however, are the graphic reports from Al-Jazeera and other broadcasts.
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